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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of colleges and universities are responding to the needs of adults seeking professional training and have come to recognize the value of experiential learning. One method of assessing previous learning is to prepare a portfolio with documentation of life experiences as they related to the learning process. The East Central College Consortium, which is made up of eight colleges in Ohio and Pennsylvania, currently offers an assessment system whereby authorized faculty members from whom a petitioner is seeking credit evaluate a portfolio consisting of seven elements. The first six of these are a resume, an autobiography, a specific credit request, an abstract of learning outcomes, an explanation of learning outcomes (in which the petitioner attempts to explain the relationship of the learning outcomes to the credits requested), and a statement of educational goals. The seventh element--documentation of work experience, community service activities, noncredit courses and other training, and special accomplishments--can be presented in various forms including awards, letters of corroboration from superiors or peers, congratulatory messages of high performance, awards, newspaper and magazine clippings, diplomas, certificates, records of military service or training, books or articles published, writing samples, and lectures given on specific topics. After the assessor reviews the portfolio, a consortium board makes the final decision as to the amount of credit to be awarded. (MN)

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TECHNIQUES

Documenting Experiential Learning: Preparation of a Portfolio for College Credit

By Dorothea M. Rolls

Increasing numbers of colleges and universities are responding to the needs of adults who seek post-secondary training. Educators recognize that learning is interwoven with experience and that many adults have acquired informal experiential knowledge equivalent to that obtained in a formal classroom setting.

Recognizing the value of experiential learning and the need to convert learning experiences into college credit, educators have devised methods of compiling previous learning experiences into a foundation for further study for a college degree. There are several methods for assessing previous learning, one of which is the preparation of a portfolio with documentation of life experiences as they relate to the learning process.

The adult learner, to receive college credit for experiential learning, must condense those experiences into classroom learning equivalency and certify such by documentation. This process requires assessment by authorized faculty members of the college or university from which the petitioner seeks credit.

This method of assessing experiential learning is the one currently in use at a consortium of colleges in Ohio and Pennsylvania. This consortium, known as the East Central College Consortium, consists of Bethany College, Heidelberg College, Hiram College, Marietta College, Mount Union College, Muskingum College, Otterbein College, and Westminster College.

Upon payment of a fee of \$495.00 (March, 1986), the applicant may begin work on his or her portfolio. The applicant may enroll and begin coursework while working on a portfolio or may elect to finish the portfolio before beginning classroom work. There is no time limit on the completion of the portfolio, but most students finish in 3 to 6 months. The number of credit hours awarded depends on the individual documentation; 10 to 30 hours is the usual range of assessment credit in the East Central College Consortium.

The preparation of a portfolio for college credit assessment involves the following steps:

1. Resume

The presentation of a portfolio of life experiences begins with the applicant's resume. This resume should include, in addition to the usual information, avocational interests and activities plus business, club, and social affiliations.

2. Autobiography

The second step is the completion of an autobiography, in narrative form, focusing upon post-high school experiences resulting in learning outcomes for which credit is sought.

3. Specific Credit Request

In the next step, the applicant begins to focus on specific credit request, listing courses by department for which credit is requested. For example, if the student feels he or she has had experience in oral communication and expository writing, the specific request is as follows:

A. Arts and Humanities 6 hours

1. Oral Communication

2. Expository Writing

4. Abstract of Learning Outcomes

Following the specific credit request, the abstract of learning outcomes indicates, in outline form, the knowledge of the applicant:

A. Oral Communication II

1. Knowledge of effective platform speaking

2. Effective rhetorical readings

3. Knowledge of audience analysis

B. Expository Writing

1. Knowledge of organization of thought

2. Effective written expression through definition, analysis, and criticism

5. Explanation of Learning Outcomes

After having stated the abstract of learning outcomes, the petitioner attempts to show the relation-

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ship of learning outcomes to credits requested. The following course description and explanation of learning outcomes describe an applicant's learning experiences in Oral Communication II:

Course Description

Heidelberg College 351 – Oral Communication II

(3 semester hours). Advanced study in platform speaking. Students prepare and deliver several speeches, including one to an off-campus audience. Readings in traditional rhetoric and contemporary communication theory. Practice in audience analysis and rhetorical criticism.

I have developed my abilities in effective platform speaking through my work as a district sales manager for a well-known cosmetics company. I was required to plan and conduct large group sales meetings. All sales representatives in the district were invited to each sales meeting at which attendance ranged from 50 to over 100 people. These meetings were conducted for the purpose of informing the sales people as to current company marketing plans, sales aids, and further company plans affecting the representatives. The sales meetings were also held to teach product knowledge and for recognition of outstanding performances of the representatives. I also became an effective platform speaker in my church activities and club responsibilities. I gained knowledge of audiences over which I have presided. I have gained and have demonstrated knowledge in rhetorical readings in my work in community theatre groups and church drama groups.

The same applicant explains her learning outcomes in Expository Writing:

Course Description

Heidelberg College 201 – Expository Writing (2 or 3 semester hours). Study of exposition to increase effectiveness of expression, especially in the organization of thought through the writing of definition, analysis, criticism, and other expository forms.

I gained a knowledge of how to organize thought through planning and writing material for sales meetings and group sessions. I also learned and demonstrated skills in effective written expression in preparing and presenting papers to club and church groups. I learned to organize thought by making the necessary point or points, then the closing.

6. *Statement of Educational Goals*

The applicant for credit assessment is required to make a statement of educational goals (two or three paragraphs) that he or she believes can be reached by acquiring additional formal education.

7. *Documentation*

The final step in the preparation of a portfolio for college credit is the documentation for experiential learning. All credit requests must be followed by documentation of the explanation of learning outcomes. The documentation can be in various forms from qualified sources such as:

A. *Work experience*

1. Awards
2. Letters of recommendation
3. Letters of corroboration from superiors or peers
4. Congratulatory messages on high performance

B. *Community Service Activities*

1. Commendations
2. Awards
3. Newspaper and magazine clippings
4. Evidence of training undertaken and completed to achieve the goals and objectives of the service activities

C. *Non-credit Courses and Other Training*

1. Diploma(s)
2. Certificate(s) of completion
3. Letter(s) attesting to student's enrollment
4. Assessment instruments used in course and grade achieved
5. Military service and training

D. *Special accomplishments*

1. Books or articles published
2. Writing samples
3. Lectures given on specific topics with evaluation

8. *Portfolio Assessment*

The assessment of the applicant's portfolio of learning experiences is the final step in the awarding of college credit for experiential learning. The portfolio is evaluated by two assessors from the Consortium Colleges other than the one in which the applicant is, or plans to be, enrolled.

The assessors' recommendations for credit are reviewed by the Consortium board representing the member colleges. This board, in turn, recommends to the applicant's college the credit value of his or her experientially acquired learning. Final authority over the amount of credit an applicant receives rests with the college in which he or she is, or expects to be, enrolled for a degree.

Pioneers in experiential learning have had their differences, but all of them share a belief in the educative power of direct learning experience. Today, increasing numbers of colleges and universities award college credit through the portfolio preparation method for evaluating the prior learning acquired by adults in their life experiences.

This method, carefully controlled, can give the adult learner the added incentive to finish an interrupted higher education or give him or her the impetus to begin work toward a college degree. AAACE

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